

# News from Oman & **Southern Arabia**

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**Women  
and  
the Revolution  
in Oman**

## NEWS FROM OMAN & SOUTHERN ARABIA

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in Oman and the Arabian Gulf)

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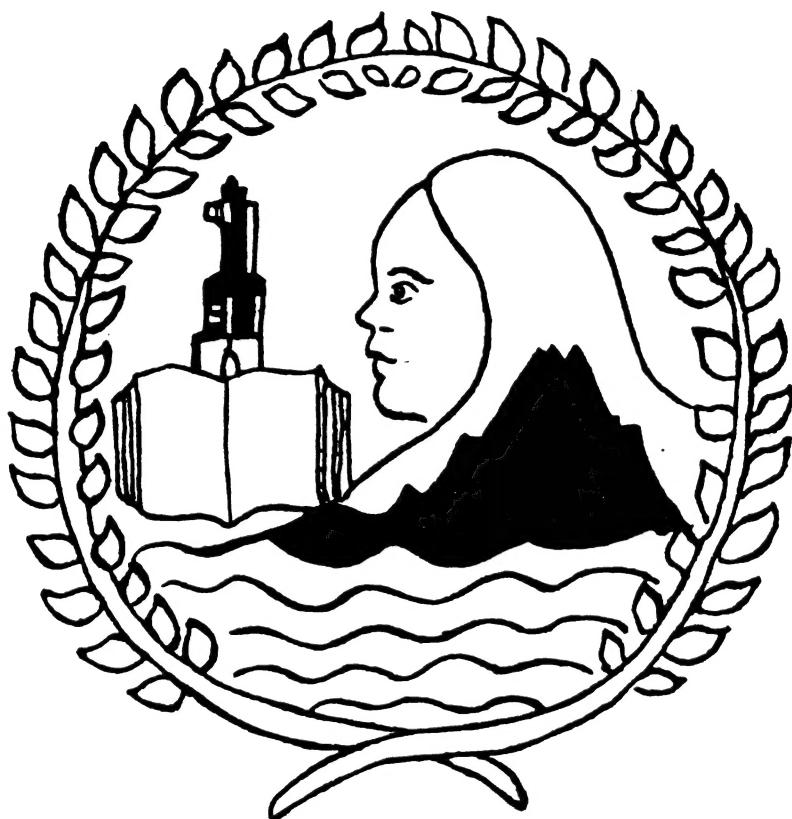
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# **CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION	3
BACKGROUND FOR AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE	6
THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE OMANI SOCIETY	19
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE REVOLUTION (1965-68)	22
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SECOND PHASE OF THE REVOLUTION (1968-74)	25
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE THIRD PHASE OF THE REVOLUTION (1974-)	35
INTERVIEWS	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY	51
SUPPORT THE OMANI WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION	53
MAP	57



## INTRODUCTION

"The struggle for the social liberation of the Omani woman is not only a necessity called for by the interest of the Omani woman herself, but a general necessity imposed by the interest of the Omani society as a whole, as without the full liberation of the Omani woman, and the release of her energies and capabilities, it is impossible to achieve the full liberation of society.

To place obstacles in front of the Omani woman and in front of her freedom from subjugation, enslavement, injustice, and oppression is in fact the same as placing obstacles in front of the progress and development of the Omani society and in front of the realisation of its liberation from all forms of backwardness.

There is a great burden upon the shoulders of the Omani woman in having to escalate the struggle for winning her legitimate human and social rights so that she can share effectively in the construction of the new Omani society. In the first place the responsibility for this struggle belongs to the Omani woman herself, and the Omani woman has to take the initiative to fight for her cause, and refuse to be dependent on the man in order to achieve her rights, and further the progress of her cause.

When we point out the importance of the woman's active role in her struggle for her rights, we must, however, at the same time reject the point of view which considers the liberation of the woman to take place without the contribution of the man and his firm backing. Since this point of view is lacking in understanding of the natural and organic relationship between men and women which is that they are complementing each other in the construction of society and in their life in general.

Therefore all Omani progressives, democrats and nationalists have a major historical responsibility in carrying out the cause of the woman by participating effectively in her struggle with firm backing and support. This responsibility should be in the center of their national responsibility.

*Moreover, to understand the social liberation of the Omani woman without national liberation and complete independence of the Omani homeland also shows a lack of understanding of the realisation and appreciation that the woman - constituting half of society - cannot obtain complete liberation without the liberation of society at large, and liberation first and above all from foreign hegemony.*

*In order for the Omani woman to make real progress towards her liberation, she has to know in depth the historical role of women and the results left behind by the struggles of women throughout history. Any negligence of the history of women, including their struggle and role in the historical development of society, would not only be at the expence of the future of the woman's liberation, but also at the expence of the future of society as a whole."*

(Document from the 2nd Congress of the Omani Women's Organization, 1979, 8)

This significant analysis of the connection between the liberation of society, the liberation of women, and of the relationship between men and women has been reached by the Omani Women's Organization through many years of active participation in the armed liberation struggle against imperialistic oppression of their country.

This special issue is a contribution to the understanding of the historical and current role of the Omani women in the revolution. The participation of women in the revolution has been shifting in strength and changed its character concurrently with the changing conditions during the various phases of the revolution. Therefore this special issue starts with a comprehensive analysis of the background for and the development of the Omani revolution in general. Then follows an analysis of the traditional role of the Omani women and their role in the various phases of the revolution. Among other things the work of the Omani Women's Organization is described. To illustrate this analysis we bring 2 interviews with 3 revolutionary Omani women. Finally, we give information about the possibilities of supporting the work of the Omani Women's Organization.



## BACKGROUND FOR AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

### The Geography of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is situated in the south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. The total area is estimated to be 310.000 square kilometers. The population is 1-1.500.000, in addition there are app. 65.000 foreigners.

Oman is divided into the following areas:

The Ras Massendum Peninsula, separated from the rest of Oman, is situated by the Strait of Hormuz through which moves app. 75% of the oil supplies of the West. Therefore Oman is a country of strategical importance.

The Batinah Plain is a narrow fertile coastal area by the Omani Gulf. The population makes a living by fishing and farming. Here you can find mechanized farms growing dates, lemons and tobacco for export.

The capital Muscat with the port Matrah is the commercial center of Oman. App. 80.000 people live here.

To the west of the coastal area in the interior of Oman runs the Hajar Mountains with the Jabal Akhdar massif (the Green Mountains). The population is concentrated in the valleys where cultivation is possible. The farming is primitive, and the production is consumed locally. To the west of the mountains in the desert oil is found. Oil is the most important export article of Oman making up 90% of the government's income. However, the Omani oil-production is modest compared to that of the other Gulf states. For example it makes up only 1/6 of the oil-production of the United Arab Emirates.

The province of Dhofar with the capital Salala is situated in the most southern part of Oman, and is separated from the rest of Oman by a desert 800 km wide. App. 100.000 people live in Dhofar. Along the coast there are plains of various widths. Here the population makes a living by fishing, farming, and trading. The plains meet the Qara Mountains where the population are herdsmen. Contrary to the rest of Oman Dhofar gets the south-west monsoon in July, August, and September which makes it possible to cultiv-

ate the land during this period.

## The Development in Oman up to the Outbreak of the Liberation Struggle

The historical background of the liberation struggle in Oman goes back to the 19th century. The confrontation of Oman with the British colonialism became the turning point of the country's further development. When the British intruded the Gulf in the middle of the 19th century Oman was a prosperous commercial centre, and its fleet was the largest in the Indian Ocean. However, British merchant ships ousted the fleet of Oman, and the economy dissolved. The economic break-down made the tribes from the interior of Oman revolt against the Sultan who resided in the coastal town Muscat and dethrone him. The British, who were interested in securing the sea-route to India, took this opportunity to obtain a foothold in the country. In 1871 the Sultan was restored by British force of arms, and since then Oman has in reality been a British colony. The British maintained their control of the country by using the "divide and rule" strategy, which means that loyal tribe-sections were privileged by getting weapons and money in order to make them interested in securing the British presence. The British made a special agreement with the tribes in the interior of Oman under the leadership of the Imam - their religious leader. The British had had troubles subduing the tribes militarily, and as the interior part of the country was without importance for the British at that time, they made an autonomy treaty for the area in 1920.

The "divide and rule" strategy kept the country in backwardness, and the population suffered from diseases and illiteracy. There were almost no schools, roads or health services in the country, and medicine, books, spectacles, and radios were forbidden.

In the period 1932-70 Said bin Taimur was Sultan, and it was during his reign that the first attacks on the British hegemony were launched: The growing need for oil in the West had made the British oil-company PDO go into the interior of Oman where they found oil in 1954. Thereby the British violated the autonomy treaty from 1920, and occup-



ied the area. But the Imam got into contact with Saudi Arabia and the American oil-company ARAMCO which was interested in getting the oil-concessions for the area, and they therefore supplied him with weapons. In 1957 the revolt in the Green Mountains broke out. The fighting grew very fierce, and the British had to throw in special units from their other colonies, and they had to carry out heavy bombardments of the villages before they after two years of fighting succeeded in crushing the rebellion in 1959. The revolt in the Green Mountains had great popular support because of the opposition to the British occupation of the area. Therefore it became a great inspiration to the later liberation struggle - but first of all it became an important experience as it had been used by the US to strengthen its position towards England, and because the leadership of the rebellion, the Imam and the Sheiks, did not want to change the underdeveloped conditions of the area.

Said bin Taimur remained in power, but the conditions for new confrontations matured. The oppression of Dhofar, the southern province of Oman, was especially violent. The population was heavily taxed, and the province was kept as a private colony of the Sultan. During the fifties and the sixties thousands of Dhofaris emigrated to the rich oil-states along the Gulf to look for work in the growing oil-industry, or to work as policemen, soldiers etc. During their stay they were inspired by the national and progressive currents passing through the Arab World and when they later returned to Dhofar, they were firmly determined to change the underdeveloped conditions in Oman. In 1964 three organizations - a "humanitarian" organization, the local branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) and an organization called Dhofari Soldiers - united to form the Dhofar Liberation Front.

### The Development of the Liberation Struggle

A struggle for liberation develops in phases, each one is characterized by the specific stage which the many different aspects of the liberation struggle have reached: the ideological, the military, the social, the economical, and the organizational aspect. The struggle is carried out in a dialectical process between the people and its organization on the one side, and the foreign imperialists and their

local reactionary allies on the other side. The following will explain the revolutionary and antirevolutionary strategy of the two parties respectively from the outbreak of the liberation struggle and up to now.

### First Phase 1965 - 1968

On the 9th of June, 1965, the Dhofar Liberation Front launched the armed struggle in Dhofar. The Front was under the leadership of a separatist wing who considered the struggle to be the last in a long series of encounters with the Omani colonialism. To them a free and independent Dhofar was the final aim of the struggle. In the beginning the fightings only took place in the central part of Dhofar by the road from Salala to Thamrit which was called the Red Line by the Front. The united forces of the Sultan and the British tried to crush the revolt with punitive expeditions (all officers in the Sultan's army were British, from the sergeants to the Secretary of Defence while the soldiers mainly were mercenaries from Baluchistan - a poor province of Pakistan). Villages and fields were burned, the areas in which the Front advanced were bombed, and the corpses of executed rebels were exhibited on the market in Salala as a warning. At the end of the period, however, the imperialist forces were not able to prevent the Front from obtaining further control of the western Dhofar.

### Second Phase 1968 - 1974

At the 2nd congress of the Front in Hamrin in 1968 the left wing took over the leadership of the revolution, and the Front changed its name to the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). The new name indicated an opposition to the separatist line. The aim of the struggle was no longer only to liberate Dhofar, but the entire historical Oman, and the Front adopted scientific socialism as its official ideology. From a strategical point of view the Front was convinced that the best way to strengthen the revolution in Oman was to unite the popular opposition in the entire Arabian Gulf to one joint organization. The role of this organization was to lead the struggle against the British and their local allies in

the entire area. In this way the struggle of the people in Dhofar in practice was linked with the struggle of the people in the entire Gulf area. The background of this strategy was the British hegemony in the entire region at that time, and the national movements which had arisen in the interior of Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait.

One of the reasons for the ideological shift in 1968 was the development in the Arab World. The defeat in Sinai in 1967 led to a process of radicalization of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in which the revolutionaries in Southern Arabia played an important role. And the same year, in 1967, the National Liberation Front seized power in Southern Yemen, and threw the British out.

Another reason was the dynamics of the revolution itself. The military success of the Front had made it possible to establish liberated areas at the end of the first phase resulting in a growing popular support of the Front. This development required a deliberate mass policy on the Front's part. The left wing of the Front proved capable of working out and realize a true popular programme mobilizing the people around health work, education, the question of women, and the political organization of the population in the local communities. The programme, representing an essential part of the new political line of the Front, became of decisive importance because it resulted in stronger popular support and thereby a growing military strength which in its turn made it possible to expand the liberated areas.

In June 1970 all of Dhofar was liberated except the Salala Plain, and the fighting spread to the northern Oman where the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (NDFLOAG) started the armed struggle in the Green Mountains.

The rapid change of the British strategy showed how seriously the imperialists looked upon this development. Already in July 1970 the British staged a coup d'etat and dethroned Said bin Taimur in favour of his son Qaboos. Qaboos was used as a puppet to establish a neo-colonial settlement in Oman, and he soon critizised his father's policies and promised to introduce reforms.

This reshuffle had some effect within the ranks of the Front. Some groups within the Front regarded Said bin Taimur, and not the British, as their main enemy, and when he was removed, they therefore left the Front and joined Qaboos. The British took advantage of these tribes-men. They paid them and sent them in groups (firquats) back to their tribal area where they were given the task of creating suspicion of the Front and to fight against the People's Army. Simultaneously the British increased their bombardments of the liberated areas where they also staged an economic blockade to prevent the traditional barter between the shepherds in the mountains and the population living on the Salala Plain.

However, the revolution took root in the liberated areas. Popular democratic councils organized the work around the solution of the people's daily problems. These councils consisted of elected representatives from the local community (who made up the majority of the councils), the militia and the People's Army. Literacy campaigns were carried out with the result that 70% of the People's Army and 50% of the local population learned to read and write. The Schools of Revolution, consisting of a primary school and an intermediate school, had 2000 pupils. The schools had a great attraction for the children of Dhofar, and some walked for days to join in the schooling. The health work was given a high priority. Health centers were started, and health assistants were trained, (read more about their work among the population in the special issue: "Health Work and the Revolution in Oman", KROAG, app. September, 1980). Military training now took place parallel with political education, and women participated in the liberation struggle in large numbers. The policy of the Front towards the tribes was remarkable. Originally Dhofar was divided in tribal areas where each tribe owned certain wells and grazing areas exclusively for its own use, and the scarce resources caused endless feuds among the tribes. In 1971 the Front abolished the ownership of the tribes, and made the wells and the grazing areas collective. The rivalry between the tribes then ceased, and the energy formerly used on mutual fights was now transformed into a joint effort to build up a better society.

Thus the British had only limited success with their new agent. The people was not fooled by the promises of Qaboos - the revolution had gained a foothold in Dhofar. And even though one of Qaboos' first actions was to modernize the army then the very same army, the British forces, and the above mentioned firquats came out badly against the People's Liberation Army. In 1971 the Front furthermore united with NDFLOAG, which struggled in northern Oman, and formed the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). This unification was a realisation of the Hamrin congress' strategical aim of linking the struggle in Dhofar with the struggle in the entire area. The British had to realize that the revolution rapidly might spread to the rest of the country.

The British counteroffensive was carried out in two phases. Their strategy was first to isolate the revolution, and then crush it militarily.

The British sabotaged the unification efforts of the revolutionary forces by splitting up the population. They strengthened the power of the local Sheiks and Emirs and developed new independent areas with special conditions. In 1971 Qatar and the UAE were separated from Oman, and the same year the island Bahrain also became an independent state. These new states were small and weak and developed their own special conditions different from those existing in the rest of Oman.

Up to 1970 England had been the only foreign power having military personal in Oman, but the British could not restrain the revolution by themselves. Therefore, they established a broad military co-operation with the reactionary regimes of the region. This co-operation took place in accordance with the Nixon Doctrine. The local regimes sent troops to fight the revolution while the USA and England primarily acted as instructors in the background. The Shah-regime in Iran came to play an essential role in the co-operation as USA had built up the Iranian military forces in preparation for exactly such a situation.

In December 1973 the first contingent of Iranian special units of 3000 men landed in Dhofar. At this time several thousands Jordanian troops had already been brought into

the struggle against the People's Front. Especially decisive was the co-operation between the Shah's airforce and fleet, and the British Royal Air Force (based in Salala and on Masirah Island) regarding bombardments of the liberated areas. By use of the "scorched earth" strategy they prevented the population from building up the liberated areas. In spite of these attacks the Front retained control of the area and made several attempts to strengthen the struggle in northern Oman, but without much success.

### Third Phase 1974 -

The formation of the three new states in the Gulf developed new conditions for the population living there. Qatar and especially the UAE had great oil-incomes which after the boom in 1973 made it increasingly possible for them to pay off the dissatisfaction of the people. In Oman things developed otherwise. In 1974 the Iranians greatly increased the number of their troops, and the amount of countries involved with military personnel on the side of the Sultan increased rapidly. Thus in 1975 a total of nine nations supported Qaboos militarily. The Omani revolution was hard pressed, and the country was occupied by the troops of the Shah.

Facing this new development the Front held a congress in the liberated areas in 1974. Because of the changed conditions the Front considered it ineffective to preserve one joint organization for the entire area. Therefore PFLOAG was divided into autonomous units the purpose of which was to carry on the struggle with a common basic political point of view, but in a way which corresponded to the conditions in their area. In Oman the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO) was formed.

As a consequence of the Iranian occupation the PFLO now conducted a broad nationalist policy. In spite of their mutual ideological differences the Front tried to unite all nationalist groups in the struggle against the Iranian occupation, and the treacherous regime in Muscat. At the congress PFLO called for a continuous strengthening of the military defence of the liberated areas.

At last, in the end of 1975 after prolonged, heroic re-

sistance causing heavy losses to the Iranians and the British, the PFLO was forced by overwhelming military superiority to evacuate the liberated areas in order to avoid physical destruction. Continuing the struggle would have been to fight on the conditions of the enemy. It didn't seriously weaken the Shah's military power to loose a 1000 men because they could be replaced easily, but to the Front every single fighter killed meant a great loss.

### The Situation Today

Today the main forces of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and 3-5000 refugees are in the border area of PDRY. Smaller units of the PLA are still operating on their own in the central and eastern part of Dhofar performing smaller military operations. The military setback caused considerable confusion within the ranks of the PFLO, and some people left the revolution. However, PFLO started a comprehensive reorganization and rebuilding programme which is carried on today. New cadres have been trained, the political education has been strengthened, the Front has improved the military ability of both the ranks and the leadership, and the organizational unity of the Front has been strengthened. An important part of the reconstruction work is carried out among the refugees in the border area. PFLO has carried on the School of Revolution with app. 550 pupils in Al Gheida (situated app. 150 km from the border). PFLO's health organization, the Omani Red Crescent, runs the Fatma Ghanana Hospital in Al Gheida and the Habkook Clinic in Hauf (situated a few kilometres from the border). The Omani Women's Organization and the Omani Youth Organization serve the needs which are special to the women and the youth. (Learn more about the situation in the border area in the pamphlet: "The Revolution is Alive", KROAG 1979). During the past years the Front has put special emphasis on the reconstruction programme and it has made remarkable progress.

The neo-colonial development, starting when Qaboos took over the rule, has continued. This has meant that Qaboos has been able to extend his class-foundation by buying new supporters within the expanded state apparatus that means: within the army, the police-force, and the government,etc.,

but at the same time the development has created new contradictions and tensions in the Omani society.

Qaboos has not been able to start an actual industrial development. Only in the construction- and building-sector there have been periods of expansion. On the one hand the developmental projects have consisted of prestige and luxury buildings: hotels, palaces etc., and buildings to be used for oppression: police-stations, military-barracks, prisons, etc. But on the other hand schools, hospitals and roads have also been built which has raised the social standard of the people. This duplicity of the developmental projects reflects a strategy often used under neo-colonialism - the "carrot and stick"-strategy (read more about this in the pamphlet: "The Revolution is Alive", KROAG 1979). However, there is no doubt which of the two aspects is dominating. The people has no political rights, the army takes almost half of the state-budget, the police-force is ever expanding, and a secret service has been organized under the instruction of SAVAK (the notorious secret police of the Shah).

The development in the construction- and building-sector where the jobs offered often are of short duration has caused a migration to the towns where the lack of housing and employment has created large slum areas with unemployment, poverty, and misery. The migration has caused problems in the agricultural sector on which the main part of the population is dependent. The dissatisfaction in this sector is growing, and the import of agricultural products has gradually reached a considerable level, and has become an economical problem. The heavy expenses of the army and the police-force have resulted in perpetual statebudgetary deficits. Furthermore, the oil-production has gone down drastically during the past years which has caused financial problems for the government. However, new promising oil strikes in Dhofar might remedy some of these financial problems in the future.

Qaboos has always tried to solve the domestic problems of Oman by calling for assistance from abroad, especially by stationing foreign troops in the country. Because

of the lacking popular support of Qaboos the foreign troops are a necessity in order to keep him in power, but at the same time their presence increases the tensions in the society. However, the development during the last two years has totally changed the conditions in the Gulf region and the character of Qaboos' foreign military protection.

The revolution in Iran has been a hard blow to the imperialistic control of the Gulf area. The US has lost its policeman in the Gulf, but has partly been able to replace Iran by Egypt. Egypt has already for some time been under development as an alternative to Iran. Because of its large population, industrial base and military tradition Egypt has the potential to become an ideal sub-imperialistic power. In the period following the October war in 1973, and in agreement with the new close alliance between Egypt and the US., Saudi Arabia has financed a heavy build-up of the Egyptian army. This build-up makes it an efficient intervention force employable elsewhere in the Arab World and in Africa which already has been demonstrated in Oman. Simultaneously with the withdrawal of the Iranian troops in the spring of 1979 thousands of Egyptian soldiers were sent to the country (app. 7000 according to the PFLO).

In addition to this reshuffle inside the framework of the Nixon Doctrine the US will in the future have to play a more direct military role in the region in order to be able to rescue its hard pressed allies. It is of course the development in Iran which has made the US take this step. The US has reinforced its naval power in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, and it has also established new naval bases and base facilities there, plus renovated the existing ones. Furthermore, the US has started the build-up of a Rapid Deployment Force counting app. 100.000 men which can be brought into action anywhere in the Gulf region. Finally it is worth mentioning that the US has increased the activities of its intelligence service in the area. The world press has represented all this build-up as a simple reaction to the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, but actually it was introduced long before.

Especially Oman has become the centre of the imperialist-

ic military build-up because Sultan Qaboos, who only can remain in power through assistance from abroad, is the most pronounced pro-imperialistic ruler in the area. Early April a spokesman for the US government has confirmed that the US will finance the expansion of a number of military facilities in Oman for the use of US forces. These military facilities, which according to the spokesman will be manned with permanent American personnel, are the air-bases by Thamrit (in Dhofar), Sib, and on Masirah Island plus the naval bases by Matrah (near Muscat) and Mina Raysut (in Dhofar). (International Herald Tribune, April 4th, 1980). On the 1st of February, 1980, app. 2000 Egyptian and American troops together with 6400 Omani troops took for the first time part in a military maneuver on the Mirbat Plain, 60 km east of Salala. (Communiqué stated by the PLA in the eastern region of Dhofar, undated).

However, the Iranian revolution has encouraged the people in the Gulf area by making them believe in the possibility of changing the present stage of things in spite of the great military power of the reactionaries. Since the overthrow of the Shah a fresh outbreak of political activities has taken place. Spontaneous demonstrations in favour of the Iranian revolution have occurred, various democratic and religious movements have arisen, and organized struggle against the regimes of the area is under development.

Also the Camp David-Agreement seems to have strengthened the revolutionary movement in the area. The agreement has caused conflicts between the pro-imperialistic regimes leading to a rather confused situation which has given the popular movements more scope. For example Oman and Sudan are the only Arab countries which have supported Sadat's initiatives, and therefore Qaboos' regime is isolated in the Arab World today whereas PFLO has strengthened its position.

The future is uncertain. If the conditions change in one part of the Gulf it will affect the situation in the rest of the area. The struggle in Oman represents only a small part of the total development taking place, but it is a fact that the PFLO has been strengthened on all levels both militarily, politically and organization wise.

Therefore the PFLO is in a more favourable situation from which to take advantage of future defects in the imperialistic system of control.

## THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE OMANI SOCIETY

Analyses worked out by the Omani Women's Organization show that the nature of the oppression of women is determined by women's position in the productive sector of society. In the following the various sectors in the Omani society are described, and the role and oppression of women are analyzed. (The analysis is based on source No.1 and 12 - see the bibliography).

With the exception of women in the commercial sector, rich peasant families, and the ruling families all Omani women share in the production besides doing house work and taking care of children. They do so partly as non-owners and partly as owners.

In the agricultural and fishing sectors women share in the production, but private property is reserved for men. In the agricultural, the fishing, and commercial sectors the oppression of women is almost the same, and as the absolute majority of the Omani population make a living within these sectors (more than 80% in the agriculture alone), the following account illustrates the conditions of the vast majority of Omani women. Within the above mentioned sectors women are controlled by a number of hard laws showing that women are looked upon as human beings of no or at best very little value. A woman must obey men and is completely under their control whether it is her father, brother, uncle or husband. In the absence of these direct relatives she must obey any other male relative in the tribe. She must even obey men who are younger than herself. Women are not allowed to mix with men or even speak with them except for very close relatives. It is prescribed women to wear a veil. Women have no right to choose their husbands or even express their opinion of him because such expression of opinion is re-

garded as injurious for the honour and prestige of the wife's and the husband's families. A woman has no right to ask for a divorce. If she is beaten or abused by her husband, she cannot even complain about him. If a woman makes a morally wrong step (wrong in the opinion of society), she is condemned by the society and will inevitably be killed because her death is regarded as a purification of her family's honour. On the other hand, men are allowed to marry and divorce whoever they want to. They can commit immoral acts and even boast of them, and in that case the honour and prestige of neither the society nor the family seem to be offended.

In the herding society, primarily found in the mountains of Dhofar, the conditions are different. (Only app. 30% of Dhofari women live within the agricultural, fishing, and commercial sectors, and their conditions are as described above). In the herding society in Dhofar the most important means of production are the animals - mostly goats, but also camels and cows, and almost all families possess cattle. Though the flocks may vary in size, the differences are only marginal and therefore the families are able to look after their cattle themselves, and do not have to employ outside labour. In this society women as well as men possess cattle. In some families the wife possesses even more cattle than her husband, and in that case the family is dependent on her. Women share in the tending of the cattle and thereby they get into contact with both men and women from other families and tribes. In general the sexual division of labour hardly exists either in production or within the family. Besides being shepherds the population in the mountains lives from primitive agriculture which is limited to the monsoon period in July, August and September. Private ownership does not exist within the agriculture. Instead a form of common tribal ownership is practised. During the monsoon all families within a tribe-section combine, and men and women sow and reap together. Then the crops are distributed evenly and when the rainy season is over, the families go their separate ways with

their cattle. - Thus the herding society in the mountains retains some of the elements of earlier classless societies.

In this society women enjoy a certain amount of freedom. They are free from some of the traditions which pacify women and imprison them at home. Women walk unveiled and mix freely with men. They talk to whoever they want to - male or female - and go for visits without having to obtain the permission of their husband or father. When looking after the cattle women stay away from home for many hours, sometimes all day. If a husband abuses his wife, it is accepted that she leaves him and seeks protection with her parents. A divorced woman is also accepted. Women are not looked upon as mere abjects of pleasure and producers of children, but are respected in society by men.

However, the freedom of the herding woman is not complete. Also in this sector a woman is looked upon as a human being of less value than a man, and also here women have to obey men. Even though divorce is accepted, it is men and not women who have the right to divorce. If a woman leaves her husband in case of cruelty, her father can force her back if he does not consider the honour of the family to be offended by the husband. Neither are women allowed to stay away from home for a longer period of time. One of the cornerstones in the traditional society is the system of bride-price, that means the amount paid by the husband to the wife's father at the time of marriage. This system, which is widespread in the Arab World, is very oppressing for women who have no influence at all on the choice of partner and actually are reduced to the stature of cattle, because they are married off to whoever is able to pay the highest bride-price, often older men with some wealth. Moreover, the practise of bride-price helps to justify the oppression and exploitation of women within the marriage. In the herding society the bride-price consists of different numbers of cattle. Besides that polygamy is widely practised by the tribal leaders.

The oppression of Omani women is further intensified by the policy conducted by the ruling family of the country in alliance with foreign imperialistic powers. In this

connection the policy of Said bin Taimur (1932-70) is of special importance as it was during his regime the Omani revolution was started. Women were not allowed to emigrate or even leave the country together with their husbands when they looked for work in the richer oil states along the Gulf. Therefore the majority of the inhabitants in many villages were women, and in some villages no men were left. Women were also excluded from all education which kept them in illiteracy and backwardness.

A militant Omani woman has summarized the situation of women in this way:

*"We suffered from four sultans. We had the political sultan - the Sultan of Muscat, the tribal sultan - the Sheikh, the religious sultan - the Imam, and the family sultan - the father, brother and husband".*

(14, p.376).

Thus the conditions of the Dhofari herdswomen were characterized by oppression on one hand, and relative freedom on the other. This relative freedom became decisive to the early involvement of women in the liberation struggle which broke out in Dhofar in 1965.

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE REVOLUTION (1965-68)

Soon after the liberation struggle began, the women showed a positive attitude towards the armed struggle. The Front has summarized the early involvement of women in the liberation struggle in the following points:

1. Women showed greater interest than men in the practice of the revolution, its achievements, and the military reports.
2. Women showed great interest in political education, and an outstanding aptitude for political understanding.
3. Women were eager to eliminate illiteracy, and were more forceful than men in their demands for education.

4. Women often kept parts of their family's scanty food supplies in reserve for fighters who might arrive unexpectedly. They did this without informing their husbands or imposing this economic burden on them, and without fearing the possible consequences for their families.
5. Women tended the wounded despite their lack of training.
6. They suffered many a hardship in providing water and ammunition for the battle front.
7. They courageously faced the dangers of reconnaissance- and intelligence tasks.
8. They demanded weapons and the right to fight alongside the men at the battle front in order to participate fully in the revolutionary struggle".

(1,p.33-34)

It must be emphasized that women spontaneously involved themselves in the struggle against the oppression of the hated Sultan. Their participation was not the result of a deliberate woman policy on the Front's part. What happened was that women all around supported the men in concrete situations on the battle-field, and this was accepted because it often happened when it was a matter of life and death. Thus participation of women in the liberation struggle was accepted through practice, and did not result from a realization of the fact that a woman is a human being equal to men, and therefore should have the same rights and duties in society as them. Consequently, the situation arose that men, who participated in the liberation struggle, in reality accepted the participation of women, and benifited from it because of the common goal, but otherwise retained the traditional look that women are inferior individuals.

However, this situation was precarious because the participation of women in the liberation struggle sapped the prejudices that women have poorer abilities, qualities, and values as human beings in general. If women carried out the tasks taken on by them in the liberation struggle just as well as men, it weakened the prejudice that women in general have poorer abilities than men. If women exposed

themselves to the same dangers as men, it proved that women are just as courageous as men, and also are ready to make sacrifices in the struggle. As a result of these experiences of themselves as individuals of importance women developed a certain self-confidence. If a woman experienced herself as an individual whose actions actually influenced the development of the liberation struggle, an individual of whom the lives of other people depended, an individual who exposed herself to great danger in the interest of the cause, then she got a self-respect which made it natural to expect a similar respect from others, not only during the fighting, but as a human being as well.

Generally a struggle for liberation leads to a disintegration of the entire social order and the existing social norms. In a society like the Omani these norms normally are regarded as natural and unchangeable phenomena. However, the development of the liberation struggle proved that it was possible to change the social norms. If a woman felt an urge to participate in the liberation struggle so strongly that she ignored and exceeded the existing social norms, it was thereby demonstrated that the norms neither were unchangeable nor neutral, but actually something that had an influence on the struggle and therefore had to be adjusted to its conditions. And if a woman had exceeded some of the norms through her participation in the liberation struggle, then it was not quite so inconceivable and hard for her to exceed other norms if necessary. And women who took part in challenging the ruling power found it easier also to challenge the power of men within the family and the tribe.

Thus the role of women in the first phase of the revolution was characterized by their more and more active participation on certain levels of the liberation struggle, and the consequences of this development: A growing opposition towards the oppression of women, increased demands for women's participation on all levels of the struggle, and the problem that men and women taking part in the common struggle did not take up a common attitude towards the participation of women in the liberation struggle and the role of women in general. This situation caused conflicts among fighting men and women, who became uncertain

what was right and wrong.

The problems arising from this development and women's demands for total integration in the revolution made it increasingly necessary for the Front to take a deliberate political position on the question of women's liberation.

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SECOND PHASE OF THE REVOLUTION (1968-74)

At the second congress of the Front in 1968 the question of women's role in the revolution and society was a major issue. In 1970 the Front described the development in this way:

"Since its Second Congress (Hamrin 1968) the Front has considered women's contribution to the struggle to be one of the conditions for a successful revolutionary changing of the social structure. It took up the issue on the ideological and practical levels in 1968 as a result of practical proposals. This resulted from the logic which links the ideological and intellectual front with practical revolutionary struggle. The Front is convinced that women should take part in and contribute to the revolution. This is one of the practical issues which the revolution must face and solve.

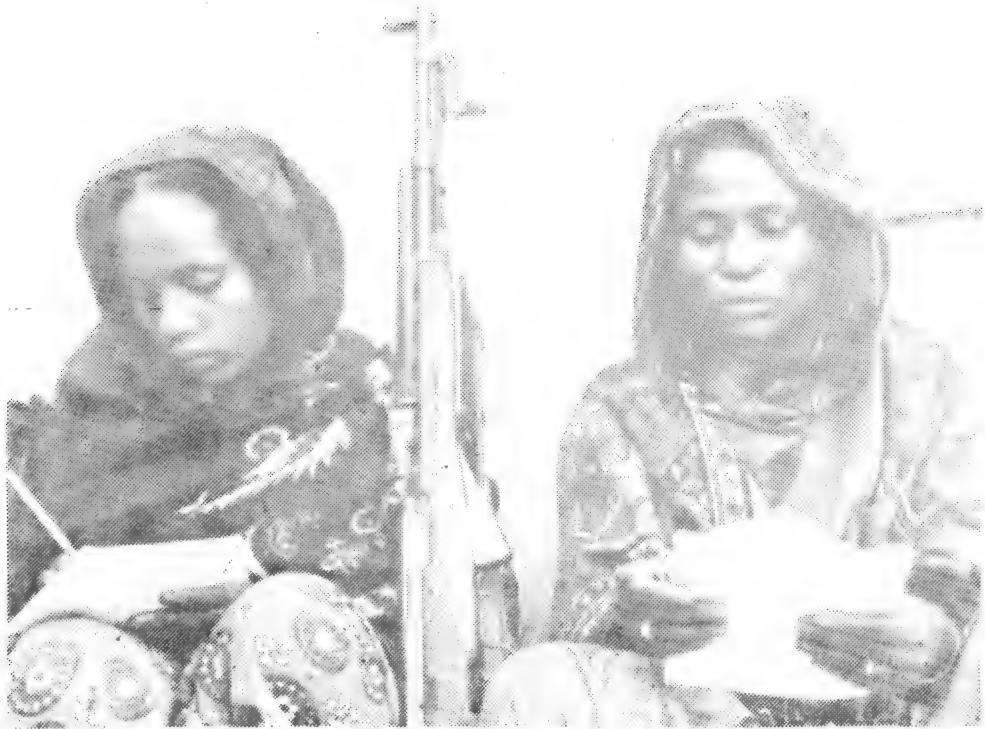
The national liberation struggle is the framework within which we mobilize and recruit women and carry out the struggle against women's oppression. Women have proved that they are capable of carrying out all the tasks of the revolution as well as men, and this has placed the struggle against women's oppression at the centre of the revolution's strategy on all levels - the military, political, organizational, and ideological....

Women's position and participation in the revolutionary movement is the real test of a revolution's creativity and commitment."    (1, p.35)

It is characteristic of the strength and foresight of the socialist forces that the result was not that women were allowed to participate on a limited scale in the struggle, but else were to remain in their traditional role. Such a development would reflect either an actual opposition towards women's emancipation, or the short-sighted and wrong view that the struggle would be weakened, if the general look upon women also was to be changed, because this could provoke people who otherwise would take a sympathetic attitude to the liberation struggle and cause tensions among fighting men and women. Instead the Front advocates women's participation on all levels of the liberation struggle, and women's emancipation in general. One reason for the Front to conduct this policy is that women's emancipation in itself is one of the goals of the struggle, and that it is the nature of the dialectics of the revolution that while you fight against the old society, you simultaneously form the ground work of the new socialist society. Another reason is that the liberation struggle can become more effective if women, who constitute half of society, participate on all levels, if women have the possibility of developing and using all their abilities, if their participation is not limited by prejudiced ideas and if the contradictions between men and women are solved correctly because these contradictions are not antagonistic, but something inherited from the old society and actually are bad for both men and women. Generally the liberation struggle can become more effective if the revolutionary movement fights on all fronts besides the military level: - against the oppression of women, against prejudices and superstition, against illiteracy and ignorance and against bad hygiene and bad health conditions - because every result achieved on one level means better conditions for the struggle on other levels.

Thus the role of women in the second phase of the revolution was characterized by women's participation on all levels, and the Front's struggle against oppression of women on all levels. Following, the developments on the military, educational, political, and social level are described.





## The Military Level

As a consequence of the resolutions passed by the Hamrin Congress concerning women's integration in the revolution the first women were trained at the military camp in 1969. After this they could join the People's Army or the People's Militia. More and more women joined the military camp, and in 1973 women made up app. 30% of the People's Liberation Army. Women have played a prominent military role in the struggle against the Sultan's army and the foreign troops, and many have been killed, imprisoned and tortured. There exist numerous narratives about the courage and resolution shown by women. Here is one of them:

*"A unit of the People's Army was moving near the front-line. Two comrades of the unit, a man and a woman, stayed behind the enemy lines with a radio. They were hiding in a cave in a valley and did not notice that they were surrounded by the enemy. The enemy fired at the cave from the top of the mountains from 6 o'clock in the morning until 12 noon, but was not able to go down in the valley and therefore called for helicopters to bomb the cave. They bombed for 1½ hours and believed that they had destroyed everything, but then the two comrades appeared in the opening of the cave and started shooting again. The woman comrade considered the situation, realized that it was impossible to do anything and decided to fight until death. She told her comrade to destroy the radio while she engaged herself in a suicide operation. She wanted to fight until she was killed while he destroyed the radio, and then he was to do the same. She went out of the cave with her gun, ignored the enemy and walked towards their position. When the enemy forces saw her, they began laughing as they did not respect women. They believed she wanted to surrender and stopped firing. When she realized, she was in a good position, she began firing and killed or wounded the entire enemy force. Then she called her comrade and they joined the other members of their group".*

(passage from an unpublished KROAG interview with a male member of the People's Army, 1976).

Many women have had leading positions in the armed struggle. One of the most famous women is Fatma Ghanana who played a leading role in the attack on the town Mirbat. She led the attack and killed many enemy troops. Later she was killed during an encounter near the town Sadh. It is said that her six comrades were killed, and that she was wounded in arms and legs, but before she died she managed to destroy the weapons of her comrades, so that they did not fall into the hands of the enemy. Today the PFLO hospital in Al Gheida in PDRY is named after Fatma Ghanana.

### **Education and Political Schooling**

Education, not only for children, but also for adult illiterates, was given high priority in the People's Army and among the civilian population in the liberated areas. The Front had a clear understanding of how important reading- and writing lessons are for the further development of the revolution because it is an important tool in the process which makes people understand their own reality and participate deliberately in the historical development of society. Thus the general and political education was of especial importance for women in order to make them able to undertake greater tasks and take a graver responsibility in the liberation struggle.

Many girls joined the primary and intermediate school of the Front. Here they learned to read and write and received a general political education. In the beginning it was difficult to persuade parents to release their daughters from the duties of herding and to allow them to leave home for long periods of time, The propadanda of the Sultan regime also did its best by claiming that the children were kept prisoners in the schools so that the Front later on could use them as cannon fodder; that the pupils were indoctrinated in communism and atheism; that sexual excesses took place etc. - However this problem diminished as the revolution advanced. Thus in 1973 the schools of the Front had about 300 girls out of app.1000 pupils. They received the same education as the boys, and each class had pupils of both sexes.



The Front also started literacy classes for adults. These literacy classes were joined especially by women, but each class had both male and female pupils. This reflected a deliberate policy of not segregating the sexes and thereby preserve the old barriers.

In the military camp women received a political schooling besides the military training, which lasted longer than the one received by their male comrades. This was due to the fact that during the fifties and the sixties thousands of Dhofari men had emigrated to other Gulf states to look for work, and here they had received various education and political experiences while women had their first political experiences when they joined the revolution. Thus women in particular needed education and political schooling.

It was a deliberate policy of the Front that women cadres were to form a fundamental part of the Front's organization, and that these women cadres should have full responsibility on all levels. Furthermore, the Front constantly prompted women to use all their energy in developing their abilities in general, and especially in developing their abilities to scientifically analyse society. Consequently, during this period women became actively involved on all levels of the Front with the exception of the highest level: the Central Committee, which not yet has had female members. However, the revolutionary women do not want a formal equality on this level if there is no basis for it. A representative from OWO has put it this way: "*The absence of women in the Central Committee stems from a lack of developed capabilities for such positions - until there are women ready for higher leadership, we are not going to put up figureheads for mere show*" (6, p.34).

Women distinguished themselves by their dedicated revolutionary spirit - also in the beginning of the seventies when the enemy tried to entice the population away from the liberated areas and into the towns which were under control of the regime.

*"Women stood with huge national stubbornness and insistence against this ugly conspiracy. They rejected con-*



*tinuation of the matrimonial relations if their husbands fell into the laps of the enemy. Some of the areas witnessed the steadfastness of women in spite of the fall of many of the family members into the laps of the authority. But women refused to abandon the revolution in which she felt - for the first time in her life - her human dignity". (7)*

The counterrevolutionary propaganda machine also tried in vain to entice wives away from the eastern region and into the towns by misinforming them that their husbands, who were fighting in the People's Army in other regions, had surrendered and that they could meet him in town.

### The Social Sector

The decision of the Hamrin congress to make the emancipation of women one of the priorities of the Front also resulted in new marriage and divorce laws.

The system of bride-price prevailing in the traditional Dhofari society was very oppressing for women as they were reduced to commodities which were sold to whoever was able to pay the highest price, and moreover it cemented the older men's (the fathers of women) authority over the younger men (the future husbands) and helped to preserve the barriers between "higher" and "lower" tribes. In 1970 a women's platoon therefore proposed the abolition of the bride-price, and later that year the Front decided to reduce the bride-price to a nominal sum as a transitional step towards its complete abolition. The purpose was to allow men and women to choose freely their partners without interference from a third party. The new laws meant that a couple could marry regardless of their family's opinion. Moreover, polygamy was abolished, and men were no longer allowed to divorce their wives as they wished. Divorce was only granted if the local popular councils accepted the motive, and now also women could apply for a divorce.

A number of old prejudices and taboos of women, for instance that women were forbidden to carry guns, to nurse, to milk cows etc., were overcome by the demands of the liberation struggle. Actually the existence of changeable taboos made it easier to change people's attitude. Once it

had been proved through practice that women for instance could milk cows without bringing about any major disasters, it became easier to argue against other curtailments of women's freedom.

The efforts of the Front to raise the political consciousness of the people in general, and the example shown by its cadres also gradually affected the attitudes of the people towards women's position in society. However, the most important thing was men's experience of women's achievements in the People's Army, in the military camps, in the literacy classes, in the schools, and in the ideological field. A representative of OWO has put it this way:

*"Radical changes have taken place in the thinking of both men and women. Women no longer depend on men as they do in capitalistic societies, since both men and women depend on the revolution. The result is that new types of relations between men and women are developing".* (5, p.25)

### THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE THIRD PHASE OF THE REVOLUTION (1974 - )

For a long time the extensive participation of women in the revolution had required a regular women's organization to pursue new aims, to find ways to attain these aims, and also to consolidate the achieved results. A women's organization was considered to be important in the mobilization of women for the following reasons:

Firstly, there existed as mentioned a number of special obstacles to women's integration in the revolution in the form of traditional prejudices of women's inferiority, their worthlessness as human beings, their poorer abilities and their limited position in society in general. These prejudices were widespread among both men and women. Furthermore, pregnancy and parturitions place women in a particular situation involving specific problems, and as the child-minding and house work still is taken care

of by women, then the weight of this sphere also becomes a specific woman problem. Women in the liberated areas had already tried to solve one of these problems spontaneously by organizing collective child-caring so that women took turns looking after the children. It was natural to try to spread such ideas deliberately as it could be done by a women's organization. At the same time it was also an important political task to consolidate the advances made by women, to fight for further advances, and also to ensure that women's participation in the revolution never is restrained either in level or in time. It was important to learn from the experiences of the revolt in the Green Mountains (1957-59) when men forced by the circumstances allowed women to bring them food and information, but at the same time retained the traditional look upon women as inferior individuals.

At its 1974 congress the Front therefore decided to form The Omani Women's Organization, OWO. In preparation of founding the OWO six months of political discussions were carried out. A preparatory committee and various subcommittees were set up to arrange political meetings for women. Moreover, the subcommittees visited women in their homes explaining to them the importance of OWO, the importance of women playing a vital role in the revolution, and the importance of women participating in the work of the women's organization. Only in this way women can become conscious of themselves as an oppressed group so that they can fight against this oppression. The subcommittees started new literacy classes and political education and encouraged women to participate in other activities outside the home. The preparatory committee also held several meetings to evaluate its own work and the work of the subcommittees. Analyses and resolutions were worked out and distributed for discussion before they were submitted to the first general congress.

In June 1975 OWO was officially formed and held its first congress. On this occasion the organization adopted a working programme to comply with the obvious needs. The analysis and agenda of the congress are illustrated

by the following passages from one of the documents passed by the congress. (3)

"The liberation of women cannot be achieved through men making concessions to women, but through constant organized struggle by women on the economic, social, and political levels. The liberation of women is not indicated by the percentage of female workers or employees in government departments or corporations, nor by the number of employees or secretaries in Ministries, nor by the number of educated women or university graduates. The liberation of women is fulfilled through the effective contributions of women on the productive, social and political levels ....

It is clear that an understanding of the significance of the women question coupled with an understanding of the importance of the participation of women in the national struggle is a first and essential step towards women's emancipation. The main task of the women's and of other organizations is to explain to all women their basic human rights, how they can fight for these rights, and what major role women can play in reconstructing society..."

The concrete tasks of OWO are summarized as follows:

- "1. To enlighten and mobilize women around the woman question and women's liberation which cannot be achieved except through the liberation of the entire society from colonialism and its puppets in the area.
2. To educate the broad masses of women in a patriotic spirit and to include these masses in the ranks of the Omani revolution under the leadership of the PFLO.
3. To educate women and eliminate illiteracy by opening literacy centres in areas populated by illiterate women.
4. To organize weekly courses on social and political issues.
5. To change women's situation by mobilizing them to join in mass activities, and in the struggle a-

*against the British and Iranian colonial presence in Oman.*

6. To struggle against the incorrect ideas that women's only role is marriage and the production of children..

We are working to establish a special agitation department for women. Its first task is to meet the specific problems of the less-educated women, to raise their consciousness, and to lead them towards participation in the revolutionary struggle. The other task is to mobilize women to make demands in their capacity as women, and to defend the right to for instance maternity and child welfare programmes, the reduction of house work etc. We have made the basis for this work, and hope to develop it in the coming period....

The Organization of Omani Women is at present working to train women cadres who can lead the Omani women's movement as a whole, and form a women's vanguard. It will in no way compromise on women's demands for equality with men. Nor will it allow anyone to pacify women, or to stop them after the completion of the liberation struggle. We are well aware that traditional ideas remain in the minds of many people for a long time - even after a transformation of the social system. We are building a cadre force in order to lead women towards their liberation, so that they will reach the end of the road and not stop half way".

### **The Role of Women Today**

Women in particular were affected by the general demobilization in the ranks of the PFLO following the military setback at the end of 1975. This resulted from the fact that women primarily had played a prominent role in the military field of the liberation struggle as they on the ideological and organizational levels suffered from the lack of experience and education. As mentioned earlier many men had received education and political experience when they worked in the Gulf states, thus before they joined the Front, while women had their first education and political experience when they as young girls joined the revolution. The military setback therefore removed the most important basis of women's position

in the liberation struggle. At the same time women had only a limited possibility of playing a prominent role in other fields of the struggle due to the lack of skills in reading and writing, political knowledge and experience; and consequently many women in the border area were demobilized. They left the People's Army and the Schools of Revolution to get married and then relapsed into their traditional role.

In the light of this development the existence of OWO has been of vital importance since the evacuation of the liberated areas. OWO has tried to implement the working programme of its first congress in the border area, and as this represents an important part of the general rebuilding programme, it has been given high priority by the PFLO. Since the setback OWO has worked hard to engage women in its activities. OWO has emphasized that women have to play a prominent role in the fields in which the practice of the Front is concentrated on to-day, that is the ideological and organizational fields. This is only possible if women engage in educational and political activities, so that they develop their capabilities and raise their consciousness on issues concerning women and politics in general. The primary obstacle to such an engagement is the traditional role of women where they are stuck with house work and child-caring. In order to overcome this problem OWO has organized child-care in connection with the various educational activities. Moreover, OWO has organized education for those women, who lived in the refugee camp near Al Gheida, and were not able to attend the ordinary education in the town because of their large families. Besides, the PFLO has tried to ensure young girls a better educational level by introducing a law that forbids them to marry before they have finished Secondary School.

OWO has continued the work with literacy classes and political and cultural meetings which was started in the liberated areas, but never was consolidated because of the offensive of the Iranian invasion troops. OWO also stresses visiting women at home and discussing their specific problems. These visits are an important part

of the continuous mobilizational work, but have been very difficult, because the families in the border region live dispersed over a large area and because OWO until recently has not had any means of transportation at its disposal.

OWO has also taken the initiative in building up a centre for women in Al Gheida which represents a great step forward in the mobilization of women. Women living isolated will be able to attend educational, cultural and political activities, and simultaneously the children can be looked after at the same place. The number of activities will be increased and include for instance sewing and typewriting, and there will be a maternity and child welfare clinic. All this will make it more attractive for women to join the centre.

### The Second Congress of OWO

Under the slogan: "Struggle for Liberation, Democracy and Social Progress" the Omani Women's Organization held its second congress in June 1979. The congress evaluated the work of the organization since its foundation in 1975 and laid down the lines for its future work. Moreover, the congress discussed the general situation of the Omani revolution, and the perspectives of the progressive movement in Oman and in the entire Gulf area. Below, the structure of OWO is briefly described, and then follows a summary of the most important decisions and resolutions passed by the congress.

### The Structure of OWO

Any Omani woman over fifteen, who accepts the programme and internal regulations of OWO, can become a member of the organization. The members are under obligation to share in the activities of the organization, and work to improve and develop its practices. The members are organized in local branches, which elect their own leadership.

The highest authority of OWO is the General Congress which is held every three years. Here delegates of all local branches meet and discuss the political line and practice of the organization and lay down the general

lines of the future work. The Congress elects the President of the organization and the fourteen other members of the Central Council which is the highest authority of OWO between the congresses. The Central Council meets every half year. It elects the members of the Executive Bureau, which meets every three months. The Executive Bureau directs the work of the organization between the meetings of the Central Council, and undertakes the implementation of the decisions and resolutions passed by the Congress and the Central Council. The Executive Bureau is composed of seven members including the President of OWO.

### The Objectives and Tasks of OWO

The second congress of OWO passed a number of resolutions on the future objectives and tasks of the organization. Here follows a summary of these (8, 9, 10, 11):

OWO divides its objectives and tasks into three levels: the local, Arab, and international level.

At the local level the general objectives of OWO can be summarized in the following points:

- to struggle for an independent Oman without foreign military bases and troops.
- to fight for the democratic rights of the Omani people including the right to organize in trade unions, the right to strike, the right to express freely one's opinion and criticism, the right to arrange peaceful demonstrations, and the right to move freely in the entire Oman.
- to fight for a legal system based on internationally approved rules of law including the right to a defence, the right to appeal and prohibition of all acts of torture, incidental arrests, ransacking of houses, and infringement of Omani citizens and their property.
- to fight for women's emancipation on all levels, that is the political, economical, social, and matrimonial levels, including the right to participate in political and social activities, the right of employment and

education, the right to choose freely one's partner, and the right to apply for a divorce. Moreover, OWO demands a reduction of the bride-price, and prohibition of humiliation and corporal punishment of women.

- to fight for special privileges in connection with pregnancy and parturitions, and for the establishment of nurseries and kindergardens all over Oman.
- to combat illiteracy and spread education and the national culture among Omani women.
- to train female cadres to lead the struggle of women.

Concretely OWO will continue its work to preserve the progressive social laws gained by the Omani women through their extensive struggles and sacrifices in the revolution. The OWO will continue its work to eradicate illiteracy among women and take further steps to develop women's skills through technical and political courses. OWO will also carry on political and cultural meetings in order to raise the political consciousness of women and to preserve the national culture. The organization will expand its publicational activities by developing its monthly magazine, and by preparing publications on the struggle of the Omani woman and her role in society. Besides, OWO will continue its efforts to build up the above-mentioned cultural centre for women.

At the Arab level OWO considers its most important task to be the strengthening of the struggle of the Arab nation against imperialism and zionism, and against all conspiracies aiming at liquidating the Arab revolution and the Palestinian struggle. Concretely OWO wants to strengthen its relations with other Arab women organizations, and to participate in Arab women conferences in order to spread information about the Omani revolution and in order to exchange information and experiences in general and thereby promote the cause of the Arab woman and the Arab nation. OWO wants to strengthen the "General Union of Arab Women" because OWO considers it to be the sole legitimate representative of the Arab women. - It should be mentioned that Qaboos has set up various women organizations, but these are not mass movements as their active members primarily are wives of ministers etc.



Qaboos makes persistent attempts to harm OWO for example by trying to have it expelled from the "General Union of Arab Women". However, he has not succeeded as the majority of the women organizations supports OWO.

At the international level OWO considers its work to be a contribution to the struggle of mankind against imperialism, facism, and racism and also a contribution to the struggle of women all over the world. Therefore OWO wants to develop and consolidate its relations with all democratic organizations in the world, especially all international democratic women organizations including the "Women's International Democratic Federation".

Besides, the congress especially greets the Yemeni women, the Palestinian women, the Iranian women, the Bahraini women, the Eritrean women, and the Sahara women.

## INTERVIEWS

The two following interviews are with three revolutionary women of the Front. The interview with Tufula and Amina took place at the military camp of the Front in the liberated areas in 1970 (14, p.378). The interview with Hudda was performed during the visit of a KROAG delegation to the border area in December 1977. Hudda is one of the leading cadres of OWO and at the same time (in 1977) she attended the lessons in the 6th grade at the Schools of the Revolution.

### Interview with Tufula and Amina

Tufula, aged fifteen, and Amina, aged twelve, are members of the People's Liberation Army.

*Question: Why are you fighting and supporting the revolution?*

**Tufula:** Because British imperialism is killing our men and women. We are fighting to get them out.

*Question: What did your family do?*

Tufula: My family are shepherds in the western province and I used to work with them. For three months of the year we grew crops, and for the rest of the time we were nomads, herding our flocks. I never went to school or learnt to read. I joined the Front two years ago, and my parents tried to stop me. I felt, I should join my comrades.

Amina: I lived in Salala, the capital, and you cannot escape by land as it is surrounded by a big fence. So I escaped by sea with my brother. That was last September.

Question: *Why did you run away?*

Amina: Because of imperialism. My father was a poor farmer, he got four or five rupees a day. We were very poor. So my brother got an old car-tire and we swam in the sea for eight hours till we reached the coastline controlled by the Front.

Question: *Weren't you cold and frightened? Could you swim?*

Amina: I couldn't swim well, and we got very cold and hungry and thirsty. But it is better to die in the sea than be captured by the British.

Question: *Who thought of escaping? You or your brother?*

Amina: Everyone thinks of escaping.

Question: *What is the life like in Salala? Have you seen British officers or the Sultan?*

Amina: Sometimes I'd see British officers out shopping, but they generally stay at their base. I've never seen the Sultan.....

Question: *How did you hear about the Front in Salala?*

Amina: People found leaflets against the Sultan. They said: "This is good and so is the revolution".

Question: *Tufula, since joining the Front, what have you done?*

Tufula: Well, at first I was in the militia, and then I took part in defending Shahbout when the enemy attacked it in the summer of 1969. The battle

lasted for 24 hours and I carried water to the fighters at the front. I think that I was the first woman in the western area who joined the army.

**Question:** When did you learn to speak Arabic?

**Tufula:** The Front taught me, and I learnt from working with comrades in the Front. But it is still difficult.

**Question:** What have you learnt from the Front since you fled, Amina?

**Amina:** I've learnt literacy, politics, and revolution.

**Question:** Do you ever miss your parents?

**Amina:** I don't think about my parents, I think about the revolution....

**Question:** What do you think of the relations between men and women and the system of marriage contracts here?

**Tufula:** It is a pity to ask something from a person if you are going to marry him. If I want a man I'll marry him because I want to, and he won't have to buy me. Anyway, there is no difference between men and women. I've seen that I can do the same, as they do. Before the revolution women used to be bought and sold and dispensed with like animals. Now they know their rights and take part in the struggle along with everyone else.

**Question:** What do you think of Islam? Are you religious?

**Tufula:** I live in a society of people who pray, and I'm one of them.

**Question:** Do you find that men resist the equality of women and hang on to their old ideas? What about marriage here?

**Tufula:** Marriage has to come after the revolution as it might slow down our work during the struggle. We are fighting here in Dhofar, and Dhofar is part of the Gulf. There is a problem about women participating since their families usually resist, and some

people say that if the women join, the British will come and take them and kill them.  
But people are getting over this .....

Postscript: In 1971, following this interview, Amina was seriously wounded, and Tufula was killed in a British bombing raid. Tufula was the first woman soldier who got killed in the Omani revolution.

### Interview with Hudda

I was born in Nheiz in the central region of Dhofar. My family was poor and owned only twenty camels of which the greater part was killed during the bombardments. I had four sisters and three brothers. One of my brothers was killed by the enemy.

During the monsoon we lived many families together in a valley where we grew beans and other crops. The families working together belonged to the same tribe-section. I belong to a section under the Qara tribe called bayt Qatan. Every family had its own small piece of land, but everybody helped each other with the cultivation. When the monsoon was over, the families set out separately with their cattle.

We children helped in many ways. For instance we fetched water for the cultivation and looked after the cattle. The work primarily depended on the women as boys and men mostly went to the market in town etc. Also women owned cattle and were therefore respected by the men. Men and women had their separate belongings which they could take with them in case of divorce. Moreover, women could move freely in the area and did a lot of the daily work. All this meant that women enjoyed a measure of freedom. In principle women could not apply for a divorce, but it was not unusual that they simply returned to their parents taking their belongings with them. Often the husband tried to get his wife back, but in many cases he had to give up. This mostly happened in the eastern region of Dhofar where a more lax morality prevailed. For example, poems and songs were made about women who loved other men than their husband, and later on married them. All parties concerned took part in such cases: the husband, the wife, the lover, the brothers and the rest of the family,

and sometimes it even resulted in a regular feud.

The people felt the oppression of the regime in their daily lives. Only in the towns the population paid regular taxes. In the rural areas the leader of every tribe-section was in contact with the regime, and was responsible that some of the animals, milk, and gee (a kind of butter) were given to the regime. Furthermore, the families had to give a part of the crops which were grown during the monsoon. Finally, the tribal leader was committed to give the Sultan presents which were collected from the people. The people were subjected to a number of foolish restrictions. For instance, they were not allowed to wear shoes or cut their hair. The regime also tried to split the tribes, for example by supporting a family in letting its cattle graze on the grazing ground of another family.

In 1968 I got into touch with some comrades of the Front who travelled about to mobilize the people, and I joined the illegal organization. In 1970, at the age of seventeen, I joined the People's Liberation Army. At that time the regime slandered all women who joined the revolution by claiming that they only did so for pleasure.

At first my decision to join the army caused me a lot of trouble with my parents. They were afraid they would be imprisoned, because I joined in the revolution. Therefore my family tried to prevent me from doing this. Some families even tried to kill the children who wanted to join the revolutionary movement. I was also threatened by some close relatives. Still, I felt it was my duty to join the revolution, and the Front backed me up and tried to make my family understand. Later on they accepted my participation in the struggle, and even encouraged me to carry on since many members of our family had been killed. Moreover, they lost the greater part of their cattle, and the cultivation was made impossible because of the bombardments by the enemy. The area where my family lived, was the heart of the revolution, and was therefore especially exposed to the terror bombardments.

When joining the army I first stayed in the military

camp for one year. Here I learned to read and write and furthermore we learned about the experiences of other revolutions in the socialist and progressive Arab countries. Only women stayed in the camp for one year as they were especially oppressed and consequently needed more education. Men did not stay in the camp that long. During my stay there we were 84 women and 70 men.

After having finished the military training and the education the majority of women joined the People's Army, and the rest joined the People's Militia. My group in the army counted 20-30 women and 40 men. We were divided into smaller units dispersed over a large area. Every unit had both male and female members. A unit could be composed of just one man and one woman, or even of one woman only.

The people had a great respect for women joining the army. At that time the entire area was controlled by the Front and therefore women were very encouraged to join by their brothers, husbands and the rest of their families. Sometimes the women who did not support the revolution were mocked. The revolutionary principles did not allow chauvenism, but of course there were a few who did not believe that women were capable of undertaking the same tasks as men.

Life in the army was good, and men and women took part in everything on equal footing. This created a strong feeling of fellowship, and I was very encouraged. Our unit mostly moved about to encounter the attacks of the enemy. Life was very rough. Sometimes we did not have anything to eat for several days, and often we only had rotten beans. I had very close relations with my comrades. We lived as brothers and sisters; and the next moment many of them were killed. Still, we carried on the struggle because we had lost so much which was dear to us.

Especially after the Iranian invasion we met strong opposition, and were involved in many battles, perhaps more than one hundred. For example, I took part in a battle in the Al Mummar region in 1973 (Al Mummar means road). This region is located between the western and the central part of Dhofar, and was of great importance because the

Front's line of communication passed through here. The enemy therefore made many attacks in this area. At that time they had one base in this region from which they attacked the base of the Front, but we had always scouts on guard so we knew when the enemy was coming, and thus had time to prepare an ambush. The battle lasted from seven o'clock in the morning till nine o'clock in the evening. The enemy used airplanes and mortars and bombed so heavily that I thought I was going to die. It was a hard battle. We neither had food nor anything to drink. The Al Mummar region consists of very open country with no trees at all, and therefore every movement can be seen. At last the enemy withdrew, and we captured a lot of weapons, ammunition, and food. The enemy, who was in a clearly majority, suffered heavy casualties, whereas we only had two wounded comrades out of thirty. Sometimes just two revolutionaries were able to defeat the enemy because we knew all the hiding-places of the area.

I got married while I was in the army, but in 1975 my husband was killed during a battle in which we fought in the same unit. Normally a married couple were not in the same group, but even if they were, they could be separated for long periods.

Shortly after I was moved to the border area, and was given the task of taking part in the establishment of the Omani Women's Organization. At first we faced quite a lot of problems. The women did not understand the importance of the organization at this time because it was so soon after the offensive of the Iranian invasion troops where the revolution suffered heavy casualties and was forced to withdraw. Many people were confused by this, since the Front usually was victorious. Another problem, not yet solved, was that women lived dispersed over a large area and therefore were difficult to keep in touch with.

My hope and aspiration for the future is to unite all Omani women in a joint organization turned against the oppression of the regime, and to gain the total liberation of Oman.

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### Documents from the First Congress of OWO, 1975

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- 13 OWO: Statement of Omani Women's Organization on Inter-

national Women's Day. 8 March, 1980.

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- 15 The Gulf Committee: Women and the Revolution in Oman. London, 1975. 43 p.
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Besides the above mentioned titles this special issue is based on informations gathered through interviews and correspondence with the Omani Women's Organization.

Please note that wherever we have used quotations from OWO documents in this special issue, these have been extensively paraphrased in order to improve the English.

In the bibliography only the titles are mentioned which especially treat the situation of women. In addition to this we have used a great part of the existing general literature about Oman as background material. We refer to the bibliography in "The Revolution is Alive" (16) and to the current bibliography "Oman and Southern Arabia. A Current Bibliography", which is published about twice a year as a supplement to "News from Oman and Southern Arabia".

A number of the above mentioned sources are not easily available, but for those who are interested we can deliver photo-copies at the price of 20c/10p or equivalent per copy. (If you pay by check, add \$1/f0,50 to cover bank charges).

## SUPPORT THE OMANI WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

Today OWO carries out a large-scale mobilizational work among the Omani women living as refugees in the border area in PDR Yemen. This work includes:  
Educational Activities - literacy classes, technical courses such as typewriting, and training in basic hygiene, child care etc., production - OWO has for example made tents for the refugees before the monsoon in 1979, and organizational/political activities - participation in the organizational work of OWO, for instance organizing of the above-mentioned activities, editing and production of the monthly magazine of OWO and other political/educational publications, study circles, meetings etc.

An essential part of this work is the establishment of a cultural centre for women in Al Gheida. When finished, the major part of OWO's activities will be concentrated in this centre which according to the plans will include the following sections:

- 1) Office of OWO.
- 2) Literacy Classes.
- 3) Maternity and Child Welfare Clinic.
- 4) Kindergarten.
- 5) Sewing Workshop (Tailoring Centre).
- 6) Rooms for Educational, Cultural and Political Activities.

At the end of 1979 the buildings for the kindergarten and the maternity and children welfare clinic were finished; and in the beginning of 1980 they were furnished and started operating. This is the most important part of the centre because women cannot participate in other activities if they have to look after the children. When it becomes economically possible, the other sections will be finished. The sewing workshop will be given highest priority.

During recent years a number of European (especially Scandinavian) support groups have made a considerable con-

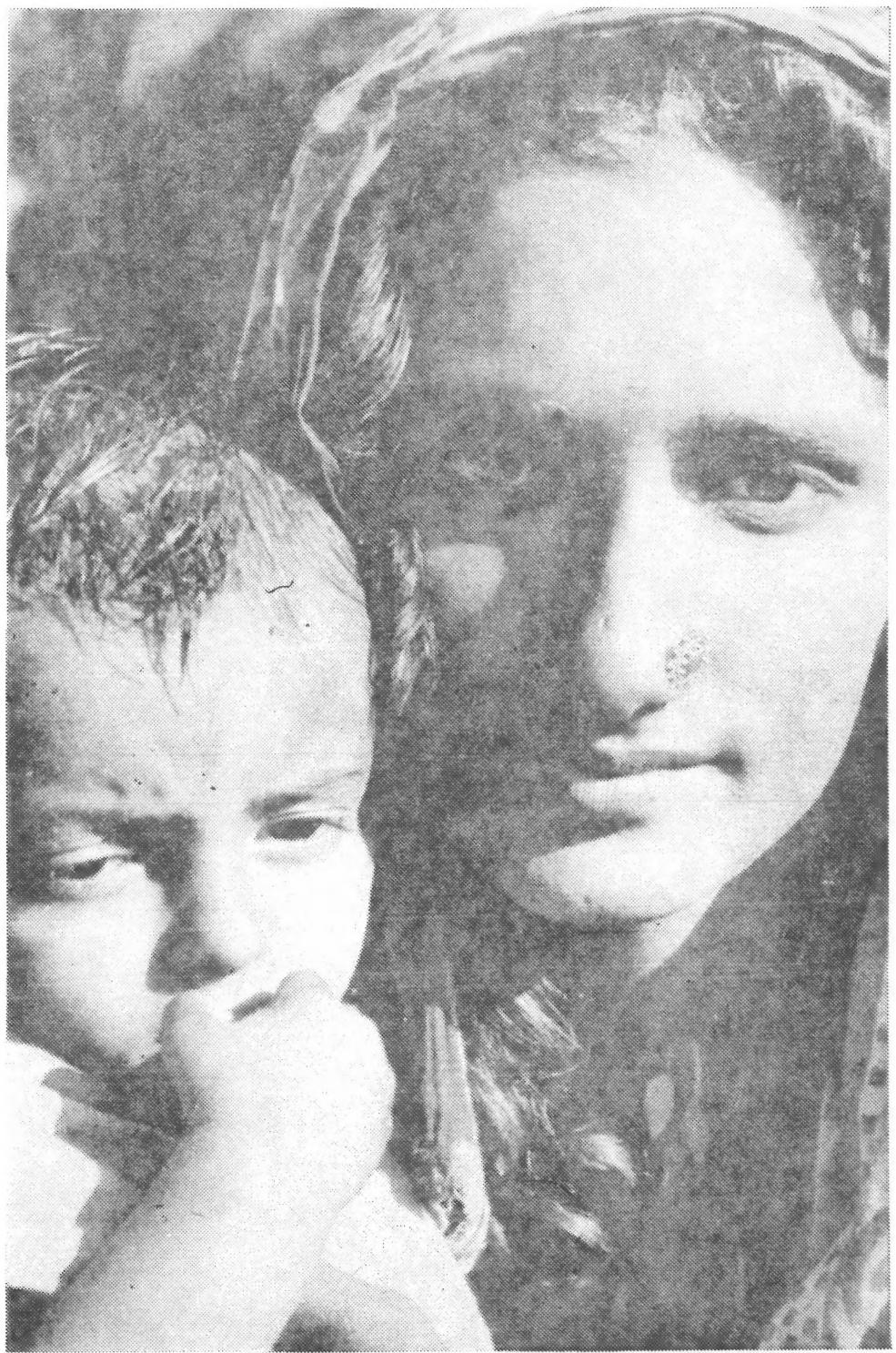
tribution to the work of OWO. They have among other things sent two Landrovers (primarily for the use of transportation of children to the kindergarten and back), audio-visual equipment, loudspeakers, and Arab typewriters for educational purposes. Moreover, shipments of used clothes were started from the beginning of 1980.

OWO has during recent years achieved remarkable results, but without continuous material support in the years to come it will not be possible to consolidate and extend the activities. All together OWO estimates the total budget for the next two years to be app. 120.000 \$. (Further details can be required from KROAG which coordinates the projects in support of OWO).

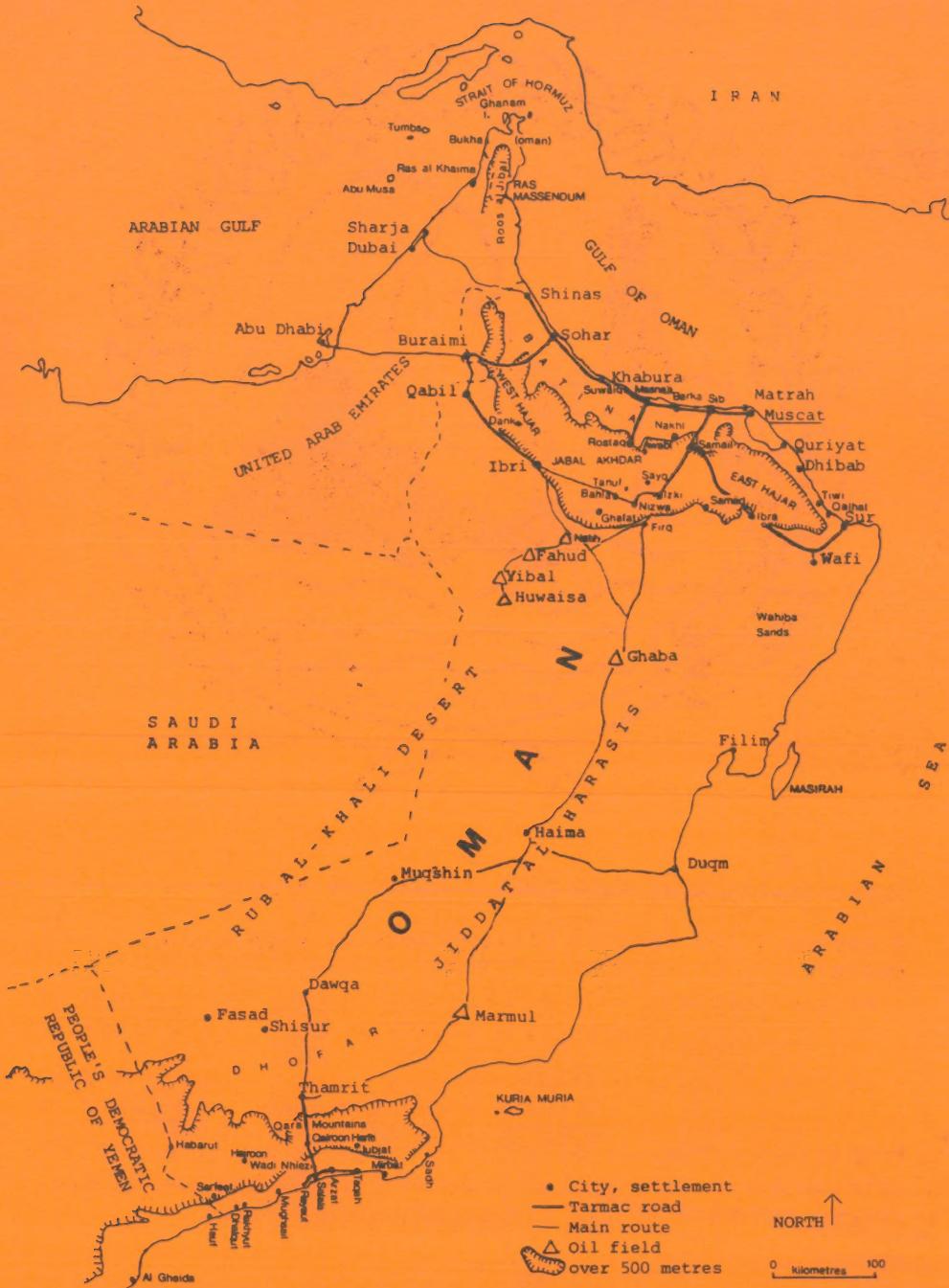
You can support the projects for OWO by sending your contribution to "Support the People of the World", Box 86, DK-1003 Copenhagen K, Denmark (by cheque, international postal money order or giro - Danish giro No. 7 30 33 00). The collection "Support the People of the World" is established by KROAG and all money received is used to finance solidarity shipments for the Omani people.

#### SUPPORT THE OMANI WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

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